

# **SENATOR JOHN BREAUX**

## **Opening Statement**

### **Special Committee on Aging**

#### **"Healthy Aging in Rural America"**

**March 29, 2001**

I thank the Chairman for assembling today's hearing on "Healthy Aging in Rural America" and I thank our panel of expert witnesses for being here today. The Special Committee on Aging has long served as a focal point in the United States Senate for discussion and debate on issues affecting older Americans. While today's hearing marks the beginning of a coordinated effort between the new Chairman and myself, it also serves as a continuation of the Committee's ongoing commitment to improving the lives of our nation's elderly.

Every member of the United States Senate serves a rural constituency. I, for example, proudly serve not only the residents of New Orleans and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, but also the residents of Zwolle and Cut Off, Louisiana. Of course some Senators serve more rural areas than others, but we all understand that the needs of our rural citizenry often differ from those of our more urban constituents. This fact is compounded when we discuss the needs specific to an aging population.

It is understood that maintaining quality of life requires, among other things, adequate health care, functional housing, and the ability to travel from point to point. While Congress often finds itself struggling with these issues nationwide, focusing on rural areas across the country often reveals an even more pronounced challenge. To further that focus to include only the elderly in these rural areas and the barriers grow even more daunting.

However, there are innovative and effective means of overcoming these obstacles. I am certain that the testimonies we hear today will provide the Committee and the public with proven methods of meeting these challenges. I look forward to hearing specific examples of successful programs which can be replicated elsewhere and I hope we can help others who are active in these areas to avoid an unnecessary duplication of effort.

Again I thank the Chairman for convening this hearing and I thank our witnesses for the willingness to share their successes with us today. Thank you.